

Message Text

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SUBJECT: REPUBLICAN PARTY CONGRESS PREPARES PARTY FOR
REGIONAL ELECTIONS

SUMMARY: THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S (PRI) RECENT NATIONAL CONGRESS CONFIRMED ON BALANCE THE PRI'S OPPOSITION TO THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE, ITS INTENTION TO CONTINUE AS LONG AS POSSIBLE IN THE MORO GOVERNMENT PENDING A RETURN TO THE CENTER-LEFT, AND ITS REJECTION OF A PROPOSED LAY FRONT WITH THE LIBERALS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS FOR THE IMPORTANT JUNE REGIONAL ELECTIONS. ON THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE, THE PARTY'S PLATFORM MADE THE COMPROMISE'S POTENTIAL INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS A MAJOR PLANK FOR THE PRI REGIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THE CONGRESS REVEALED CONTINUED STRONG PRI PRO-ISRAEL SENTIMENT AND REAFFIRMED THE PRI'S COMMITMENT TO EUROPEAN UNITY AND THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE. IF LA MALFA DOES STEP DOWN AS SECRETARY, AS HE HAS ANNOUNCED, HE WILL MOST LIKELY BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE PRI, AND ODDO BIASINI, A LESS COLORFUL BUT MORE BALANCED LEADER IS EXPECTED TO SUCCEED HIM AS POLITICAL SECRETARY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE REPUBLICAN PARTY NATIONAL CONGRESS (PRI) HELD IN GENOA, FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 2 PROVIDED A MEASURE OF THE PARTY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION, THE FUTURE OF THE CENTER-LEFT, AND THE LIBERAL PARTY'S (PLI) REVIVAL OF PROPOSALS FOR A COMMON
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LAY FRONT COMPRISING THE PLI, THE PRI, AND THE SOCIAL DEMO-

CRATS (PSDI). THE CONGRESS ALSO FORMULATED THE PARTY'S PLATFORM FOR THE IMPORTANT REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN JUNE, AND MARKED THE EMERGENCE OF A SMALL BUT MILITANT LEFT WING IN A PARTY HITHERTO NOTABLE FOR ITS LACK OF FACTIONAL DIFFERENCES.

2. LA MALFA'S VIEWS ON THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE AND THE WEIGHT OF THE CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE AGAINST IT ARE BEING REPORTED SEPARATELY. IN THE DEBATE IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT EVEN THE PARTY'S LEFT WING REJECTED THE COMPROMISE AS AN "EXTREMELY NEGATIVE" IMPEDIMENT TO ITS OWN DESIGN FOR A UNITED LEFT. BUT THE STRONGEST OBJECTIONS TO THE FORMATION OF HISTORIC COMPROMISES ON THE LOCAL LEVEL WERE MADE BY DELEGATES FROM PCI-DOMINATED AREAS WHO SET OUT TO DISMANTLE WITH FACTS AND FIGURES WHAT THEY VIEWED AS THE MYTH OF EFFICIENT PCI LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION. LA MALFA RHETORICALLY CONSIGNED THESE REPORTS TO THE PCI REPRESENTATIVE TO THE CONGRESS SITTING IN FRONT OF HIM, AS EVIDENCE OF THE PRI STATE OF MIND.

3. THE SPEAKERS ALSO REVEALED AN OVERWHELMING PREFERENCE FOR A RETURN TO THE FOUR-PARTY CENTER-LEFT TO SUCCEED THE MORO GOVERNMENT, EVEN THOUGH THIS VIEW WAS ALSO SOMEWHAT OUT OF PHASE WITH LA MALFA'S INSISTENCE ON KEEPING ALL OF HIS PARTY'S OPTIONS OPEN. NO ONE BUT THE SMALL LEFT WING CHALLENGED IN ANY WAY LA MALFA'S COMMITMENT TO HELP KEEP THE MORO GOVERNMENT AFLOAT THROUGH THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS. (IN THE CONGRESS'S FINAL DOCUMENT THIS POLICY WAS TRANSLATED INTO "AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.")

4. THE PRI'S UNEQUIVOCAL "NO" AT THE CONGRESS WAS RESERVED HOWEVER, FOR THE PLI'S PROPOSAL OF A PRI-PSDI-PLI LAY FRONT PROPOSAL. THOSE SPOKESMEN WHO DID NOT USE THE ISSUE MERELY TO POLEMICIZE AGAINST THE LIBERALS AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS REJECTED IT AS ABSURD UNLESS IT WERE EXTENDED TO THE SOCIALISTS. NO ONE THOUGH IT REALISTIC AT THIS TIME IN ANY FORM, BUT THE ISSUE DID OCCASION SOME OF THE SHARPEST CRITICISM OF THE PSI FOR HAVING BEEN THE MAIN OBSTACLE IN THE PAST TO SIMILAR PROPOSALS BY THE PRI, MOST RECENTLY AFTER THE MAY 1973 DIVORCE REFERENDUM.

5. ON INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS, SEVERAL LEADERS, MOST NOTABLY
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UNDERSECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ADOLFO BATTAGLIA, PROVIDED CORRECTIVES TO LA MALFA'S PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE US-USSR POWER RELATIONSHIP BY POINTING TO THE MIDDLE EAST AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHERE THE BALANCE HAD IN RECENT YEARS SHIFTED AWAY FROM THE USSR. BATTAGLIA'S TREATMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENERGY PROBLEM, FOR WHICH HE HAS PRIME RESPONSIBILITY IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, FIRMLY SUPPORTED SECRETARY KISSINGER'S APPROACH. THE CONGRESS ALSO REVEALED STRONG PRO-ISRAEL SENTI-

MENT, AN UNQUALIFIED COMMITMENT TO EUROPEAN UNITY AND, EXCEPT FOR THE SPLINTER LEFT WING, A FIRM COMMITMENT TO THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE.

6. IN KEEPING WITH LA MALFA'S ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO LEAVE THE PARTY SECRETARYSHIP AFTER 10 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP, THE PRI ADOPTED A THREE-POINT PLATFORM INCORPORATING THE LA MALFA "PATRIMONY." THE FIRST TWO POINTS ENDORSE THE MAJOR ECONOMIC AND INSTITUTIONAL (REFORM) PROPOSALS OF THE PARTY DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS BY SIMPLE REFERENCE TO THE DOCUMENTS WHICH CONTAIN THEM. THE THIRD POINT CITES THE "WEAKENED SECURITY SITUATION OF WESTERN EUROPE, AND ITALY AS PART OF IT AND LOCATED NOW ON ITS FRONTIER." "GIVEN THE ABSOLUTE PRIORITY THAT NATIONAL LIBERTY AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE COUNTRY HAVE OVER ALL OTHER CONSIDERATIONS," THE DOCUMENT EXPLICITLY PROVIDES THAT A CORRECT EVALUATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION WILL BE THE PRIME MESSAGE TO BE PROJECTED IN THE PRI CAMPAIGN FOR THE FORTHCOMING REGIONAL ELECTIONS.

7. COMMENT: APART FROM THE ISSUES, THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECT OF THE CONGRESS WAS THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY ITSELF. THOUGH IT POLLED BARELY 3 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE IN 1972, THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE DELEGATES, AND THE YOUTH AND SOPHISTICATION OF SO MANY OF THEM PROJECT THE IMAGE OF A PARTY IN VIGOROUS EXPANSION. SOME DELEGATES PROCLAIMED THAT THE PRI STANDS A GOOD CHANCE OF EMERGING FROM THE NEXT NATIONAL ELECTIONS AS A SIGNIFICANT ELECTORAL FORCE. INDEED, THE PRI CONTINUES TO HAVE NATIONAL RELEVANCE IN THE PUBLIC'S MIND NOT ONLY THROUGH ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE MORO GOVERNMENT, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE QUALITY OF ITS MINISTERS, AND ITS SOPHISTICATED AND INTELLECTUAL STYLE WHICH MALES IT ESPECIALLY ATTRACTIVE TO PROFESSIONALS AND EDUCATED YOUTH. THE EMERGENCE OF A WELL-ORGANIZED LEFT WING WHICH INCREASED ITS

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STRENGTH FROM 3 TO 12 PERCENT IN THE NATIONAL COUNCIL VOTE IS ANOTHER SIGN OF FERMENT. THE FACTION PUT FORTH A WELL-ELABORATED PROPOSAL, IN SUBSTANCE IDENTICAL WITH THAT OF THE PSI'S LEFT WING, CALLING FOR A GRAND ALLIANCE OF THE LEFT TO CONFRONT THE DC DOMESTICALLY, AND TO PURSUE AN ANTI-BLOC "AUTONOMOUS" FOREIGN POLICY INTERNATIONALLY. IT THREATENS TO LIMIT THE PRI'S FREEDOM OF ACTION, MUCH AS THE LEFT WINGS OF THE DC AND PSI LIMIT FREEDOM OF ACTION WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTIES.

8. ANOTHER LIMITATION ON THE PARTY IS LA MALFA'S IMPERIOUS AND COMPULSIVE LEADERSHIP, WHICH COULD HINDER THE PARTY IN CASHING IN ON THE VOTER ATTRACTION IT NOW ENJOYS. AT THE CONGRESS HE PROBABLY ALIENED SOME OF THE PROGRESSIVE VOTE AND THE

PRESS BY HIS EMOTIONAL OVER-REACTION TO THE CRITICISM OF HIS
ALLEGED VIEWS AND HIS DIRECTION OF THE PARTY. DESPITE HIS AN-
NOUNCEMENT, OF COURSE, THERE REMAINS SOME DOUBT WHETHER HE
WILL INDEED RELINQUISH THE SECRETARYSHIP. IF HE DOES, ODDO
BIASINI, A LESS COLORFUL BUT WELL-BALANCED AND CAPABLE LEADER
WILL MOST LIKELY SUCCEED HIM. BUT EVEN AS PRESIDENT OF THE
PARTY, (THE NEW POSITION HE WOULD ASSUME), LA MALFA IS CERTAIN
TO DOMINATE THE PRI AS LONG AS HIS HEALTH AND CIRCUMSTANCES
PERMIT. VOLPE

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